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## Letter dated 20 April 2018 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), which was established by the Security Council in its resolution 1990 (2011), and to resolution 2411 (2018) concerning the extension, until 23 April 2018, of the modification of the mandate of UNISFA, as set forth in resolutions 2024 (2011) and 2075 (2012).

In his letter dated 11 April 2018 (see annex), the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, had expressed his support for the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism in relation to paragraph 9 of Security Council resolution 2386 (2017). He also requested that his letter be circulated to the Security Council for information and action, as appropriate.

I should therefore be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) António **Guterres**

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## Annex

I am writing to you with respect to the efforts deployed by the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. Since its operationalization in 2013, the Mechanism has made remarkable achievements in providing support to the Sudan and South Sudan in the monitoring of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. In this context, I should like to express appreciation to the Security Council for the unwavering support provided thus far by the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), which has created an enabling environment for the Mechanism to implement its mandate.

I should like to refer to paragraph 9 of Security Council resolution 2386 (2017) on the mandate of UNISFA, in which it was determined that support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism would be discontinued unless both parties adhered to specific measures by no later than 15 March 2018. We duly noted the specific requests made by the Council, namely:

(a) Facilitating the full freedom of movement for UNISFA air and ground patrols, to include landing within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, by approving 100 per cent of requested sorties no later than 72 hours after the requests are delivered;

(b) Opening of phase I of the border crossing corridors;

(c) Holding at least one meeting to resume border demarcation discussions, including negotiations on the disputed areas within the framework of the signed agreements;

(d) Reactivating the Technical Ad Hoc Border Committee of the 14-Mile Area;

(e) Facilitating the operationalization of the four Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism team sites;

(f) Convening at least two meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism to resolve these issues.

In pursuance of these provisions, the African Union, most notably through its High-level Implementation Panel, exerted sustained efforts to help to overcome the challenges at hand and to meet the requirements outlined by the Security Council. At the African Union, we strongly believe that significant and tangible progress has been made to meet these requirements. I am pleased to note the recommendation contained in your recent report on UNISFA (S/2018/293) calling upon the Security Council to recognize the efforts and the important steps taken by the Sudan and South Sudan on their border and thus to continue to support the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

As I outlined in my letter of 23 October 2017, any discontinuation of the support extended to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism would risk reversing this progress and triggering tension in an already volatile environment. This, in turn, may worsen the humanitarian situation, including in the Abyei Area, which has become a zone of transit and refuge for those fleeing violence in South Sudan.

Since the adoption of resolution 2386 (2017), the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism has made significant progress. Two extraordinary sessions of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism were convened by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel in Addis Ababa, on 4 February and 5 March 2018. The next is scheduled for April 2018. On 27 February, the seventh meeting of the Joint Security Committee, which comprises the Chiefs of Military Intelligence of the Sudan and South Sudan, was held in Juba.

These meetings focused on such issues as the redeployment of forces outside the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, the operationalization of the team sites, border crossing points, the marking of the centreline of the Zone, the activation of the Technical Ad Hoc Border Committee of the 14-Mile Area and reports of the presence of unknown forces in nine locations north of the Zone. The Joint Security Committee recognized that progress had been made in relation to the withdrawal of forces from the Zone. It called for the establishment of a joint committee, with the participation of the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, to work with UNISFA in verifying the redeployment of the two armies from the Zone within 15 days, and recommended that the Joint Political and Security Mechanism expedite the process of determining the exact coordinates of the border crossing points with the Technical Team.

I should like to highlight the following steps taken over the past months:

(a) In order to facilitate full freedom of movement for UNISFA air and ground patrols, both parties decided to grant standing clearance for all ground monitoring and verification patrols, as well as helicopter landings, within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone;

(b) The border crossings to be opened in phase I were identified at a meeting convened by the Joint Border Technical Crossings Committee, comprising technical experts from both sides, held in Khartoum on 20 February 2018 and attended by the African Union Border Programme Technical Team. Thus far, the Technical Team has completed the first phase of the marking exercise by marking 3 of the 10 crossing points along the corridors of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, in line with the directives issued by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and the Joint Political and Security Mechanism. The main objective of the marking exercise is to make a conclusive technical decision about the location of the Zone centreline on the ground, in order to enable the parties to withdraw their forces within the Zone and to facilitate the free movement of people and formal trade between the two countries. The early completion of this exercise will also help to address misunderstandings related to the location of certain team sites;

(c) The Joint Border Commission met in November 2017 for the first time since September 2016, while the Joint Demarcation Committee met in December 2017;

(d) The first meeting of the Technical Ad Hoc Border Committee of the 14-Mile Area, facilitated by UNISFA, was held on 27 February in Gok Machar. Representatives of the two parties, along with UNISFA members, attended the meeting, at which they developed the draft terms of reference of the Committee that were endorsed by the Joint Political and Security Mechanism on 5 March;

(e) Two of the four team sites have been established. However, progress in this respect has been limited owing to disagreements among local communities regarding the location of the proposed team sites and difficulty of access. In view of this, the Joint Security Committee met in Khartoum on 31 March and, inter alia, renewed the commitment of the two countries to facilitate the establishment of team sites and recommended that the Joint Political and Security Mechanism expedite the markings of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone centreline.

I should like to add that the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and the traditional leaders of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya also met in Addis Ababa in November 2017. The traditional leaders agreed to strengthen efforts to promote intercommunal dialogue. Plans are ongoing to convene their next meeting in the Abyei Area in May 2018. The convening of the meeting in Abyei bears testimony to the stability achieved

through the efforts of UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

I wish to commend the Government of the Sudan and the Government of South Sudan for the commitment and political will that they have demonstrated by extending the necessary cooperation to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism in particular and to UNISFA in general. The positive environment promoted by these two institutions has encouraged the two parties to engage more constructively in the implementation of the various agreements that they have signed, including the security matrix of 8 March 2013, with specific timelines for each action.

Indeed, the coordinated efforts of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and UNISFA have significantly contributed towards our shared vision of the Sudan and South Sudan living side by side in peace and good neighbourliness. At the same time, it is clear that the realization of this vision cannot be complete without the full delimitation and demarcation of the common border between the two countries. In this respect, the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the international community at large need to remain engaged to ensure that this vision becomes reality.

The African Union Peace and Security Council and the Commission, through the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, remain seized of the situation between the two countries. The Security Council will be kept regularly informed of our efforts.

I am therefore convinced that the Security Council will see the imperative not only of extending the mandate of UNISFA, which expires on 15 May 2018, but also of maintaining support to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism.

While we all recognize that a peacekeeping mission can ultimately succeed only if there is a viable political process, we should also keep in mind, as I stated on 28 March 2018 during the Security Council debate, that the mere presence of such a force has, in itself, a stabilizing effect. UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism are cases in point. It would be a tragedy if the remarkable gains made were to be jeopardized by a hasty decision regarding the Mechanism.

As unfortunate as this reality is, political processes hardly lend themselves to rapid resolution. They require sustained efforts to overcome mistrust, help parties in conflict to gain the support of their respective constituencies for the compromises that are required and, ultimately, to achieve lasting solutions to their disputes. This is the exercise in which the African Union has been engaged over the past years. Needless to say, without the presence of UNISFA and the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, the advances made would not have been possible.

It is our earnest hope that the Security Council will heed the call made by the African Union.

I should like once again to put on record the appreciation of the African Union for your outstanding commitment to an ever-closer partnership between the African Union and the United Nations, as well as for your untiring efforts to promote lasting peace, security and development on the continent.

I should be most grateful if you would urgently circulate the present letter to the members of the Security Council for their information and action, as appropriate.

(*Signed*) Moussa Faki **Mahamat**